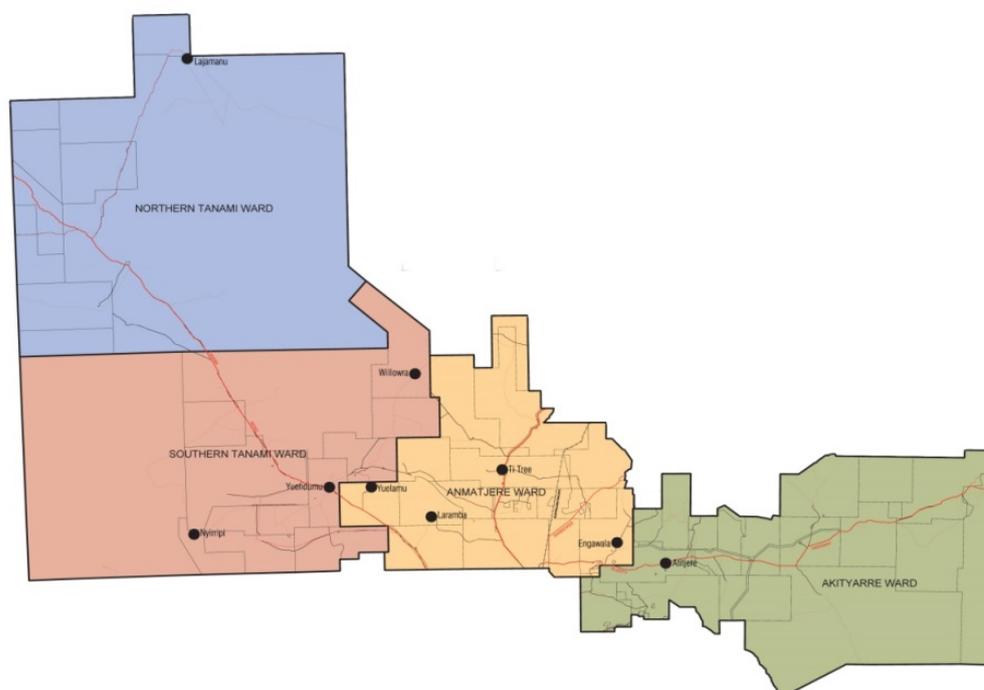


Central Desert Regional Council
Submission to the Closing the Gap Discussion Paper
 February 2018

The Central Desert Regional Council (CDRC) area is located in the central southern section of the Northern Territory, lying north of Alice Springs. Central Desert Regional Council is named to describe its location and geography; in the central part of Australia and encompassing the Tanami Desert. The land area is 282,064 Km²



The original inhabitants of the Central Desert Regional Council area were the Anmatjere, Arrernte and Warlpiri Aboriginal people. The population of the Council area increased during the early 1990s, rising from about 4,000 in 1991 to nearly 5,000 in 1996. The population then gradually declined, falling to about 4,222 in 2016.

The communities in the Central Desert are Lajamanu, Ti Tree, Willowra, Laramba, Nyirripi, Yuelamu, Atitjere, Engawala and Yuendumu. There are also smaller indigenous communities and outstations.

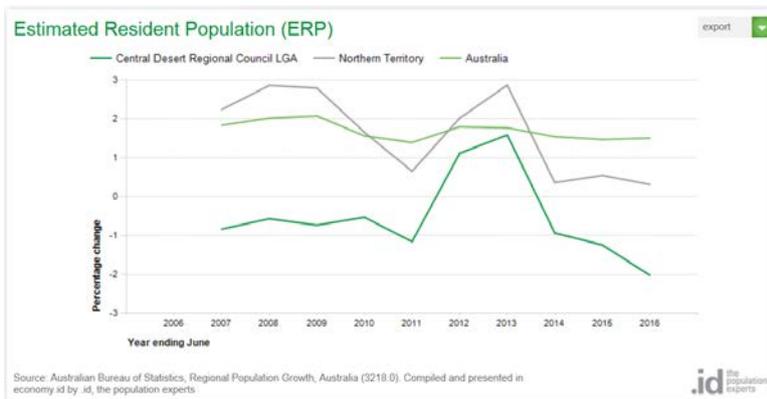
Major features of the Council area include the Tanami Desert, Arltunga Historical Reserve, Dulcie Range National Park, Trepina Gorge Nature Park, Anna's Reservoir Conservation Reserve, Nature Gap Conservation Reserve, Lake Mackay, Warlukurlangu Artists of Yuendumu, Warnayaka Art Centre, Red Sand Art Gallery and Granites Gold Mine.

Much of the Central Desert area is Aboriginal freehold land held by the Central Land Council.

Our Councillors are all indigenous and come from the four wards shown above – they are Councillors Adrian Dixon (President); Warren Williams (Deputy President); April Martin; Renita Webb; Audrey Inkamala; Robert George; Patrick Norbert; Jacob Spencer; David McCormack; William Liddle; Fred Williams; James Glenn.

The Central Desert area is considered remote and disadvantaged, for the following reasons:

1. Population - declining at a rate higher than that for Australia or the Northern Territory.



2. Demographics – need is higher with a younger population, more couples with children and a significantly higher Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.



3. Household statistics – Central Desert has less lone person households and significantly lower income, which is only partially offset by lower median weekly rent. There is a very low level of house ownership due to the land tenure situation (77% of households are renting).

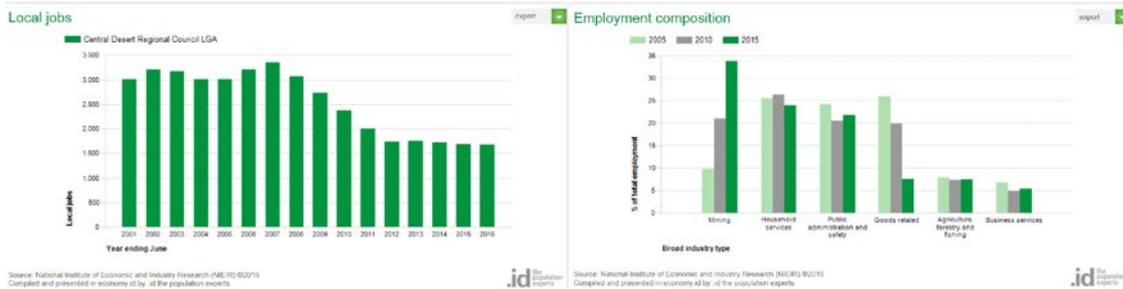


4. Education and Qualifications – Central Desert has significantly higher unemployment; and lower rates of university and other qualifications.



5. Local employment

There were 1,672 jobs located in the Central Desert Regional Council Local Government Area in the year ending June 2016. The number of jobs has declined since 2007.



In Central Desert Regional Council Local Government Area, there were 1,363 residents employed in the year ending June 2016. These residents may work in the Central Desert area or may be employed outside the area.

In 2015, the Mining sector accounted for 33.8% of employment. The importance of this sector has increased over the last 10 years (9.7% in 2005)

**Statistics provided by Regional Development Australia economy.id website*

At Council's planning and briefing day, Council reviewed and debated the five questions posed by the Closing the Gap discussion paper. Council's input is:

Question: How can governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and businesses work more effectively together? What is needed to change the relationship between government and community?

CDRC would like to see the Federal Government working directly with the community. It is felt that messages (in both directions) become diluted or confused when there is a chain of people or companies involved. We would recommend working directly with the community and not to have a chain of other companies involved. This includes coming to the communities for open discussion – not sending messengers to “tell”, but having decision makers sit down with elders to agree ways forward.

Question: How could the Closing the Gap targets better measure what is working and what is not?

CDRC believes this is the wrong question – the targets are generally good and focus on outcomes. Council particularly thinks the school attendance based targets are very important. What is not working is the actions (what we are doing) – this does not mean the targets are wrong.

Question: *What indicators should governments focus on to best support the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples? Should governments focus on indicators such as prosperity, wellbeing or other areas?*

CDRC believes the focus of “Closing the Gap” and its indicators need to be more practical. We would like to see indicators that relate to:

- Job creation
- # of secondary schools in communities
- Housing availability / Safe housing
- Roads
- Public transport
- Reducing imprisonment rates

CDRC wants the indicators to reflect improving the equity of basic services when compared to country towns.

Question: *Should Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture be incorporated in the Closing the Gap framework? How?*

CDRC recommends indigenous forums be held on communities, these meetings should be run as an open, discussion (culturally based) meeting. We understand this takes more time, indigenous people have differing views and open and robust discussion is appreciated.

The Federal Government could also improve jobs by engaging people on community to teach visitors about culture. We would also like to see initiatives that encourage more indigenous organisations. CDRC recently adopted a policy about cultural responses to property damage – we would like to see these type of community based options be used where possible instead of jail time.

Question: *What do you think are the key targets or commitments that should be measured in a refreshed Closing the Gap agenda?*

In summary, CDRC believes the key targets and commitments should be on the basics. This must include education and health. We like the current targets and believe we have to work harder, together to improve the outcomes. If anything was to be added, it might be at the indicator level to reflect “the basics” – roads, housing, public transport etc.

